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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BRASILIA 000233

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/BSC AND G/TIP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/26/2019

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KCRM](#) [KFRD](#) [KWMN](#) [ELAB](#) [PREF](#) [ASEC](#) [SMIG](#) [BR](#)

SUBJECT: BRAZIL: STATE TACKLING CHILD AND SLAVE LABOR, TIP:  
A REPORT FROM MARANHAO

REF: BRASILIA 01686

Classified By: Political Counselor Steve Liston. Reason 1.5 (d)

**¶11. (U) Summary:** The Northeastern Brazilian state of Maranhao ranks among the jurisdictions in Brazil with the highest incidence of domestic child labor, forced labor, and trafficking in persons (TIP). As one of Brazil's poorest states, resource constraints, coupled with neglect by state governments and cultural tolerance, have hampered the state's ability to effectively combat these scourges. In the last few years, however, the state government has embarked on a course to reverse this situation by establishing state plans to deal with slave labor and violence against women, passing new laws to punish employers of domestic child labor, and creating police stations exclusively dedicated to victimized women, among others. Together with a vibrant NGO community, the state of Maranhao is taking important steps that could pay dividends if it can sustain its efforts over the medium-to-long term. End summary.

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Child Labor in Maranhao  
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**¶12. (C)** Emboff traveled to Maranhao in late September to discuss trafficking in persons, forced labor, and exploitation of women and children (ref a reported on drug trafficking and public security in the states of Maranhao and Para; septel will report on TIP issues in Para). The eighth largest state, with a land area comparable to Florida and Georgia combined, Maranhao is bordered on the north east, by the Atlantic Ocean, and by the states of Para, Tocatins, and Piaui. A heavily forested plain covers the northern portion; the north central portion of the state is home to degraded, moist tropical forest that has been largely cleared for cattle grazing and agriculture; while the southern portion is mostly savannas. The state has the sixth largest population in Brazil, and is a center for afro-Brazilian culture, ranking eighth in percentage of self-described blacks, and seventh in self-described brown-skinned people among Brazilian states.

**¶13. (C)** During a meeting with several NGOs that work in the areas of domestic child labor, forced labor, and violence against women, representatives of these NGOs highlighted the

conditions suffered by women and workers in this state, and years of state neglect of the problems that, according to the collective view of the NGO representatives, only began to change in the last couple of years after the "oligarchic" governments of the past 40 years passed from the scene. (Note: A frequent refrain heard both from government and non-government figures, the term refers to the state governments prior to the election of current governor Jackson Lago (PDT- Democratic Workers Party; government coalition). Prior to Lago's election, the family of former president and current federal senate president Jose Sarney (PMDB, Amapa) had dominated Maranhao's politics. Responsible for electing the state's governor since 1966, including a stint from 1995 to 2002 when Sarney's daughter Roseana, now also a federal senator (PMDB, Maranhao), was governor of the state, the Sarney family maintains considerable political influence in the state. It owns most of the state's major radio, television, and print media outlets and is believed to be behind an ongoing effort to oust Lago on corruption allegations; if the effort is successful, Roseana Sarney would again become governor. End note.)

¶3. (C) According to Rogenir Costa, Catholic Relief Services' (CRS) representative in Maranhao, domestic child labor is an enormous problem in Maranhao, and a culturally accepted practice. Costa noted that there are currently 16,000 girls performing domestic child labor, a number that is down from 38,000 before Bolsa Familia -- the Brazilian government's multi-billion dollar poverty alleviation program -- was established. Domestic child workers -- girls from as young as nine to 17 acting as live-in maids or babysitters -- are seen

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by both the parents of the child worker and the employers, as beneficial to the working child. In their view, the burden of feeding and clothing the domestic child workers is lifted from the extremely poor and rural families who willingly give up their child. Most often, however, these girls are typically abused, overworked, and receive little-to-no monetary compensation for their work other than food and shelter, according to Costa. Some of them are allowed to study at night, but only after having done their house chores. They also have little recourse when they are abused.

Costa, cited the emblematic case 18 years ago of a 12 year old girl who accidentally dropped a baby she was caring for, leading to the baby's death, after which the parents of the baby murdered the girl. The murderers were never convicted, recounted Costa.

¶4. (C) Compounding the problem, Costa observed, child labor is an entry point into prostitution networks and sexual trafficking routes in Maranhao. Usually, according to Costa, this occurs when girls from rural areas are "hired" by families in cities; after the families are "done" with them, with little education and the prospect of returning to the poor conditions their families faced, they decide to enter the sexual trade. According to Costa, a lot of the girls end up in one of the estimated 17 trafficking routes that go through Maranhao. Although most of these routes have domestic destinations as their endpoint, according to Costa, many Maranhense girls end up on the trafficking routes to Europe that go through Suriname and French Guiana after departing on ships from the Itaqui Port in the Maranhense capital of Sao Luis.

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Source State for Forced Labor  
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¶5. (SBU) In 2007, the Ministry of Labor's Mobile Inspection Teams liberated 316 workers in the state, which placed it fifth among Brazilian states that year. In 2008, the number of liberated workers dropped to 99, placing it in 14th place. According to officials from the State Commission for the Eradication of Slave Labor (COETRAE/MA), Maranhao is one of the top sources for forced labor in Brazil, providing as many

as 38% of the estimated 25,000-40,000 forced laborers in Brazil.

¶6. (C) According to Flavia Moura, of Instituto Trabalho Vivo in Maranhao, who has conducted field research in the area of forced labor in the state, the problem is very complex and stems from the dire conditions workers face. Many of the workers know what they are getting into, but their conditions are so miserable, they do it anyway, in order to eat. Moura indicated that she interviewed workers who, after being liberated, go back to slave-like work willingly, because they have no other options. Moura indicated some workers have even learned to game the system and go back to slave-like conditions in order to receive multiple indemnizations from the government. (Note: Indemnizations for freed workers are awarded to them by the Brazilian government, which forces the companies that kept the workers in slave-like conditions to pay them as part of their civil penalties. End note.)

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Tackling the Problem: "Previous Governments Did Nothing"  
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¶7. (C) During a meeting with members of COETRAE/MA, Ubirajara do Pindare, aide to Governor Jackson Lago and executive secretary to the commission, told poloff that Maranhao is only now starting to emerge from its "feudal" state and is starting to tackle the root causes of the misery that afflicts the people of Maranhao after 40 years of governments that did nothing to improve the lives of the people. According to do Pindare, the previous government built three schools in the previous eight years, whereas this government has built 160 in two years. He continued, "this is a state that, if we were to separate it from Brazil, would

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be the poorest in Latin America". (Note: From 2003-2005, Maranhao ranked next to last in the human development index among Brazilian states; at .683 for 2005, Maranhao's figure is lower than Bolivia and Guatemala, the least developed countries in Latin America. End note.)

¶8. (C) According to a COTRAE/MA representative, using the socioeconomic indices of the 10 municipalities in Maranhao with the most liberated workers, one can see how going into slave labor willingly might be a necessary choice. For example, in the town of Passagem Franca the literacy rate is only 57 percent (compared to overall literacy rate in Maranhao of 79 percent and 89 percent in Brazil) and life expectancy is 58.71 years for males (compared to 64 years for the male population of Maranhao and 69 years for Brazilian male population). On average these ten cities have a literacy rate of 65 percent and a life expectancy of 60 years.

¶9. (C) According to Pindare, and confirmed by various NGO representatives in separate meetings with poloff, since 2006 the government of Maranhao has mobilized its resources to tackle the issues of trafficking in persons, violence against women, domestic child labor, and forced labor. Since 2006, the state government has established the COETRAE and adopted the State Plan for the Eradication of Slave Labor, a set of policies which lay out the tasks missions assigned to the various government entities to combat slave labor through preventive and repressive actions and providing services and training to victims. In the area of domestic child labor, in 2008, the governor signed into law legislation making it a fireable offense for civil service employees of the state to use children as domestic employees.

¶10. (U) The state in 2008 also established the State Plan for Public Policies on Women, which is focused on, among other things, the trafficking problem. Maranhao followed the creation of the state plan on women with a conference gathering municipal governments to focus on concerted actions to combat violence against women. The state also created a

committee for monitoring the implementation of the plan, which is composed of 12 state government departments. In addition, the state has established at least 18 police stations dedicated exclusively to attending women (DEAMs), the most in the northeast region. By contrast, Bahia, with a female population of 6.9 million, which more than doubles Maranhao's 3 million women, has only 12 DEAMs, and Pernambuco, with a female population of 4.3 million, only has five.

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Comment:  
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¶11. (C) Even when discounting the partisan boasting from officials within the government, it remains true that the current government of Maranhao did intensify its efforts to tackle the issues of domestic child labor, forced labor, and exploitation of women, including trafficking. Whereas the state government used to focus more on actions to suppress these activities -- letting civil society take the lead in preventive measures-- the new approach tackles the issues in a comprehensive manner, from preventive actions, to services to victims after the crimes have been reported, all the while partnering with civil society and the federal government. Adopting policies was, however, the easy part. Executing them in the face of budget constraints and competing demand for resources heading into the 2010 elections will be the key test that will indicate whether the plans will have sustained power.

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